

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 349 012

IR 054 107

AUTHOR Young, Peter R.
TITLE Reflections of Columbia 1968: Preparation for a Profession.
PUB DATE Apr 91
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Spring Meeting of the Alumni Association of the Columbia University School of Library Services (New York, NY, April 27, 1991).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Conferences; Futures (of Society); Information Scientists; Information Services; *Information Technology; *Institutional Mission; Librarians; Library Education; *Library Role; *Library Schools; Planning Commissions; Policy Formation; *Professional Training; Values
IDENTIFIERS Columbia University NY; National Commission Libraries Information Science; White House Conference Library Info Services

ABSTRACT

A graduate of the Columbia University School of Library Services in 1968 and the current Executive Director of the National Commission on Library and Information Science (NCLIS) argues that information professionals today are confronted with increasingly complex and conflicting missions: they must interpret the impact of change on the institutions that record and preserve the record of human achievement in ways that maintain links with their traditional mission, and, at the same time, integrate new tools, technologies, and concepts that appear to threaten the values that are inherent in the historic mission of professional librarianship. If librarians and information professionals are to develop strategies for improving the library/information science discipline and professional base, they need to recognize the necessity of building relationships, interdisciplinary links, and networks, as well as understand the public's role in helping them to balance new opportunities with their traditional values. He comments that the NCLIS and the White House Conference on Library and Information Services present opportunities for this public policy formulation process and provides information on the purpose and activities of both entities. He concludes that academic and research libraries require a resurgence of creative excitement directed at recasting their institutions and their professional mission, and that this creative thrust is especially needed in the area of professional education and training of librarians if they are to meet the needs of the future. (BBM)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

- ☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Columbia University School of Library Service
Alumni/ae Association
27 April 1991

"Reflections of Columbia 1968: Preparation for a Profession"

ED 349 012

When Charles Whitlow telephoned me last Halloween to talk about being here with you at the Annual Spring Alumni Association meeting, many frightening thoughts ran through my mind. After all these years, is Columbia's SLS really ready to hear a member of the Class of 68 express views on the "Revolution" which tore the campus apart and brought "cops" into Morningside Heights that Spring? Will Mark Rudd attend, making the meeting into a reunion of the Strike Coordinating Committee? Should I wear my black armband? Should I prepare by re-reading the (SDS) Students' for Democratic Society's "Port Huron Statement"? Will we have to re-live the turbulent, disturbing, and emotionally wrenching spring of 1968?

12054107

On June 4th, 1991, it will be twenty-three years since I received my Master of Science in Library Service (MSLS) from Columbia's School of Library Service. In the intervening years since that day, librarians have changed and Columbia's School has changed, along with those information institutions we refer to as libraries. Pervasive change makes it difficult to summarize the impact of my experience here at Columbia on my pursuit of librarianship since graduation. Nevertheless, I accepted Charles' invitation and I am here today to talk with you about these changes and to speculate about the future.

1

2

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Peter Young

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Last fall, when Charles called, I knew that the Spring of 1991 was going to be busy. Starting my new job as Executive Director of NCLIS in early August, I knew that by late April, 1991, plans for the White House Conference on Library and Information Services would be reaching a fever pitch. In fact, we only have 75 days from today until the Conference opens. With a clear understanding of the stresses and pressures involved with planning for such an event, I knew last Fall that I would be busy now. But I saw that this opportunity to engage in reflection on the past could provide valuable perspective for me, and perhaps for other Columbia alumni.

I accepted your invitation in order to gain perspective: perspective on my current work at the National Commission, on my own personal career and professional evolution since I went to school here, and perspective about the future of libraries and graduate library education; a future the profession must face without Columbia's Library School.

I am very pleased to be able to join you today. In preparing to share some personal observations and views with you, I was struck by the powerful nature of historical comparisons. Comparing and contrasting the world of 1968 with the events occurring in the Spring of 1991 is a sobering exercise. It places the events and issues in context and

provides perspective on the present that raises concern about the ability of the individual to maintain consistency amidst unrelenting change.

Our basic concepts about time are fundamental to our self identity, as individuals, as a Nation, and as a profession. These time concepts, I believe, have shifted profoundly in the last two decades and are now forcing a transformation in the function of libraries and the role of the information professional. For example, the world's attention over the past nine months has been directed from Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, to the massive deployment of U.S. military forces in the Persian Gulf region, to the continuing tragedy of the Kurdish refugees in northern Iraq. Nine months earlier, the world's attention was focused on the revolutionary political and economic transformation of Eastern Block European nations.

The pace of world change seems to increase in direct response to the introduction of new electronic information technologies. CNN brings us the 100 hour war, just as a nine second sound byte characterized the 1988 national elections. As information professionals we are confronted with an increasingly complex and conflicting missions: we must interpret the impact of change on the institutions that record and preserve the record of human achievement in ways that maintain links with our traditional mission, and, at the same time, integrate new tools,

technologies, and concepts which appear to threaten the principles and values which are inherent in the historic mission of professional librarianship.

With these shifting themes as background, I am going to talk about three interrelated topics today:

1.) I am going to share some personal reflections about the past and about Columbia in 1968;

2.) I will review the changes occurring in library and information services from the perspectives of NCLIS and the WHC;

3.) Finally, I will speculate about the implications of change on the future of graduate education in the library and information profession.

Talking with you today is a distinct honor and rare privilege. Along with other graduates of this School and this University, I have always looked to Columbia and the School of Library Service with a sense of respect, pride, and high esteem. The feeling that I have is well expressed in a quote from "The Educational Future of Columbia University" which is included in the 1966-67 Bulletin for the School of Library Service. The quote is as follows:

"...no program of professional education terminating in the first professional degree should be designed to train individuals for narrow specialties within a given profession. Such a curriculum gives the student what he can, in all probability, learn on the job, and thus neglects the obligation to give him what he is unlikely to get elsewhere. Further, it neglects the importance of providing knowledge and skills that are broad enough in character to allow the prospective professional man or

woman to move easily from one position to another, including posts of general responsibility within the profession. Finally, a narrowly based curriculum overlooks the fact that professional activity requires not simply the mastery of a specialized body of knowledge or of certain technical performances, but also the selective application of such knowledge and skills to complicated human problems. It is not only expertness that is required, but also such qualities as insight, imagination, sensitivity, and ethical responsibility."

To me the essence of the Columbia experience is summed up in the phrase "insight, imagination, sensitivity, and ethical responsibility" from this passage. These are attributes worthy of a lifetime of professional pursuit. Training and preparation for such a career is not dismissed simply by reference to coursework and seminars. If successful, Columbia's contribution must be measured by the application of our knowledge and skill to complicated human problems. Perhaps, the true measure of the MSLS degree from Columbia is found not in the number of human problems solved, but rather in the imaginative application of our knowledge, skills, and sensitivities to comprehend the complex transformations affecting our information institutions and our profession. Our future success may be more dependent upon our agility and the ability to adjust to rapid change than on our adherence to anachronistic interpretations of what functions libraries once served.

As a means of placing my remarks in perspective, I must say that my comments today reflect my own personal views and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, nor the White

House Conference on Library and Information Services.

When I began taking courses at Columbia in September 1967, I was uncertain about a career in librarianship. My undergraduate degree in philosophy did not appear to be exactly appropriate for the practical and applied curriculum concerns of LS K6011 Introduction to bibliography, LS K6021 Information and reference services, LS K6031 Technical services in libraries, or LS K6041 Organization of materials for use. Frankly, it was my need for working credentials which brought me to this school, in this city, and to the sixth floor of the Butler Library.

I remember sitting in a large basement auditorium in Butler in the fall of 1967, listening to John Humphry, the State Librarian of New York, teaching the course on American libraries. He was lecturing about librarianship as a profession and through reasoned logic maintained that librarians were a professional because we had, among other things, a professional association to represent our interests. I remember having the feeling of ambivalence about whether I saw what I was learning as professional, or whether I was getting my "Union card" to work in libraries doing lots of clerical and administrative tasks.

Today, that same debate still rages within me as to whether librarianship is a profession, an academic discipline, or whether, as some would maintain, information professionals are in

the midst of a radical "post-industrial" transition toward a new knowledge intermediary role in society. Somehow, the questions, doubts, and the searching which began at Columbia 23 years ago still forms the basis of much of my professional pursuit and activity. I believe that this search is the essence of the "...insight, imagination, sensitivity, and ethical responsibility" which Columbia had set for its educational role.

Some librarians have been calling for a re-thinking or re-conceptualization of the educational preparation of librarians. This would be the equivalent of the President's call for a populist crusade to create a new generation of American schools. I have heard many different views. Recently, I talked with Marjorie Hlava, President of Access Innovations, Inc., an international database production and design service about her company's experience with professionals. She sees the current MLS graduate as ill-prepared for performing the type of work that her company needs. She blames the library schools for not providing coursework which would prepare information professionals for work in the database industry.

On the other hand, last January I talked with a member of the University of Maryland Library School faculty about her interest in maintaining basic required graduate courses in descriptive cataloging to serve as the foundation for all information handling and organizational activity.

In order to move towards strengthening the educational basis for educating professional librarians, we need to focus on improving of the nature and quality of research performed in our field, to better define the discipline of LIS, and to demonstrate that disciplinary base. Research is important to professional practice and the theoretical base of the profession. In general, current critics complain about low research competence, lack of standards, and low levels of curriculum support for research in the library and information sciences. These critics of current research efforts point to the predominantly social science and humanistic orientation of much current LIS research, pointing out the need for more interdisciplinary LIS research, blending concerns of the scientific, engineering, and applied technology research communities with the LIS community. Linkage, for example, between LIS research and information systems design and theory might provide linkage and methodological balance with allied disciplines.

Questions about the changing model of research universities are beginning to present troubling issues for higher education in general and professional schools in particular. Costs for performing research are increasing beyond the control or ability of research institutions to maintain programs. One distressing possible scenario from this trend is the inability of research universities to afford to both teach and perform research. This

trend undermines the Medieval model for the modern university. It also presents difficult questions for graduate schools of library and information service, as well as other professional schools which depend upon research to provide new material for instruction.

In order to develop strategies for improving the LIS discipline and professional base, we need to recognize the necessity of building relationships, interdisciplinary links, and networks, as well as understand the public's role in helping library and information professionals to balance new opportunities presented by electronic technology with the values inherent in librarianship from the origins of the profession. NCLIS and WHCLIS present opportunities for this public policy formulation process.

U.S. National Advisory Commission on Libraries issued its Report to the President in July 1968 to the President's Committee on Libraries, and formally presented its Report to President Lyndon B. Johnson on October 15, 1968. Libraries at Large: Tradition, Innovation, and the National Interest was published in 1969 as the outcome of Advisory Commission activity. This work reflects the theme of the Advisory Committee and the Commission: viz. that every individual in our society be provided with library and informational services adequate to meet current and emerging needs. The national interest demands simultaneously

sympathy with people in pockets of illiteracy and people in the vanguards of intellectual achievement

National Commission on Libraries and Information Science:

- Purpose (P.L. 91-345)

Primary responsibility for developing or recommending overall plans for and advising the appropriate governments and agencies on library and information services adequate to meet the needs of the people of the United States...essential to achieve national goals....utilize most effectively the Nation's educational resources....Federal Government to cooperate with State and local governments and public and private agencies in assuring optimum provision of services.

- Functions:

Primary responsibility for:

- developing or recommending general plans
- advising governments and agencies

1.) Advise President and congress on implementation of National Policy

2.) Conduct studies, surveys, and analyses of LIS needs of the Nation

3.) Appraise adequacies and deficiencies of current library and information resources and services, evaluate effectiveness of current LIS programs

4.) Develop plans for meeting national library and information needs

Current NCLIS Programs:

WHCLIS

FSCS\IPEDS\SASS\PLUS = NCES Libr stats

Principles of Info Public

Information Literacy

Services to Native Americans

ICSOC International Conventions & Scientific Organizations

Recognition Awards

Permanent Paper

Coordination with library and information organizations and associations such as ALA, SLA, ASIS, ARL, MLA.

Glen Erin Declaration

Legislative and Regulatory Advice: Federal Information Policy Coordination - NTIS, GPO, OMB, LC, NLM, NAL, GSA

PAR

Topics of Emerging NCLIS interest:

Data analysis for policy

Assistive technology and disabled population LIS

Global information Policy

Information literacy and higher order thinking skills and their relation to libraries

Technology impact on libraries and multimedia
NREN
Preservation technologies
Information economics and policy implications
Scholarly Communications and the Economics of Information

WHCLIS

Purpose to develop recommendations for the further
improvement of LIS of the Nation and their use by the public
Composition: LIS Prof, LIS supporters, govt officials, and
general public
Preconferences
NCLIS Plans and conducts
Reprts to Pres and Cong
\$6 M appropriation authority
Themes: LPD
Topics
Conference Process
Expected outcome: Agenda for implementation
Issues:
State Library Funding LSCA and HEA
Local composition funding
Electronic technology impact on mission and programs
Role of National Info Policy
Future viability of libraries
Library Education: PhD's and Columbia, Univ of MD
Srl price increases
Talking to ourselves
Our issues on the national public agenda
Info access equity issues
Role of libraries in education
Impact of media fixated culture on education
Libraries not in information business, but in
communications industry
Impact of change on values, culutre, and individual
freedoms
Privacy of Personal information and interests
Federal information policy - fee industry
future of research and univ communciations
Foreign ownership of monopoly media

Many changes have happened between 1968 and 1991. The following irreverent comparison list gives us some measure of these changes:
Madonna has replaced the Beatles; Desert Storm has replaced Vietnam; OPAC's have replaced filing rules; school reform has replaced anti-draft demonstrations; desktop computing and distributed computing environments have replaced CRT's and IBM MT/ST typewriters; digital computing has replaced ADP; NREN has replaced time sharing; CD ROM has replaced Winchell; Coalition for Networked Information has replaced Project INTREX (MIT); the

Berne Convention has affected the Gentleman's agreement about copyright; Fax machines have replaced teletype communications; ASIS has replaced the American Documentation Institute; Preservation and Access concerns have incorporated microform technology; electronic publishing has replaced automatic language processing; Article delivery services have replaced Selective Dissemination of Information; laser input devices have replaced IBM 357 Data Collection Systems; President Bush is seeking to replace LBJ as the Education President; OCLC has replaced LC's Card Division; Digital libraries have replaced our concern for compact shelving; concern for scholarly communication has replaced conjecture about the future of the research librarian; High Sierra has replaced the MARC II Format; James Billington has replaced L. Quincy Mumford as Librarian of Congress; AACR2 Revised has replaced "Rules for Descriptive Cataloging";

Conclusion:

Finally, I would submit to you that currently academic and research libraries require a resurgence of creative excitement directed at recasting our institutions and our professional mission. This creative thrust is especially needed in the area of professional education and training of librarians if we are to meet the needs of the future. We need a new spirit of renewal which incorporates new missions emphasizing the potential of knowledge representation technology.

What is at stake in the current environment is not simply the viability of our libraries in the future: we face the even greater potential erosion of social relevance and professional validity. We need strategies to address the changes caused by a newly developing paradigm for professional information service. These strategies must transfer the spirit of democratic community and scholarly values to the emerging electronic university. The spirit of excitement and discovery, the joy of creativity, and the human potential for freedom released by scholarship and

learning demand that the commitment of our discipline be directed toward the rejuvenation and remediation of the knowledge services profession.

Thank you for you kind attention to these concerns.